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Welfarism and the multidimensionality of welfare state legitimacy: evidence from The Netherlands, 2006

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Is it possible that citizens who support a substantial role for government in the provision of welfare are, at the same time, critical about specific aspects of such provision? Based on confirmatory factor analyses, and using a 2006 Dutch survey, this study shows that welfare state legitimacy is indeed multidimensional, i.e. that opinions tend to cluster together in several dimensions referring to various aspects of the welfare state. There is partial evidence for the existence of a single, underlying welfarism dimension which consists basically of views regarding the range of governmental responsibility, as well as of the idea that these governmental provisions do not have unfavourable repercussions in economic or moral spheres. However, the separate dimensions cannot be reduced entirely to this overall welfarism dimension. This is illustrated by the finding that the various attitude dimensions are affected differently by socio-structural position and ideological dispositions.

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Introduction

Is it possible that individual citizens, each of whom fully endorses a substantial role of government in the provision of welfare, nevertheless negatively evaluates specific aspects of such provisions? For instance, being critical about what it costs in taxes, being disappointed by the social outcomes or perceiving negative economic consequences? Likewise, can citizens who reject state intervention in social affairs generally, at the same time, be positive about specific social policies and their outcomes? In other words, can welfare support be multidimensional in the sense that people have different positive and negative evaluations of diverse aspects of the welfare state in which they are living?

On the face of it, these seem rhetorical questions, with 'yes' as the obvious answer. If the answer were affirmative, it would indeed imply that people's support for the welfare state, and therefore its overall societal legitimacy, cannot be narrowed down to one underlying attitude. Notwithstanding this, most empirical analyses in the field tend to reduce welfare state legitimacy to a single dimension, indicating people's preference for government taking responsibility for the provision of benefits and services (Andress & Heien, 2001; Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 2000; Brooks & Manza, 2006; Edlund, 2006, 2007; Feldman & Steenbergen, 2001; Forma, 1997; Gelissen, 2000; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Kluegel & Miyano, 1995; Linos & West, 2003; Meier Jaeger, 2005; Papadakis & Bean, 1993; Paugam, 2003; Pettersen, 1995; Roller, 1995; Svallfors, 1999). The most popular indicators of such preferences concern what Roller (1995) called the 'range' or 'extensiveness' of the role of government (what tasks concerning what policy areas government should take responsibility for) and the 'degree' or 'intensity' of that role (how much government should spend on certain social policies).

This dominant research practice may be understandable, given the general lack of detailed data regarding

welfare attitudes[1], but it is highly problematic. Obviously, if welfare legitimacy is multidimensional, single-dimension studies can give only partial, or even false, information. In particular, the strong focus on 'role-of-government' indicators may paint too rosy a picture of welfare legitimacy, if it is true (as it is regularly claimed in the literature) that the general public readily tends to say 'yes' when asked whether or not government should take responsibility for benefits and services (see e.g. Jacoby, 2000; Pettersen, 2001). Furthermore, failing to distinguish between various dimensions might lead to a biased view of the determinants of welfare attitudes. Various studies, for example, depart from the idea that 'net-receivers' of welfare are pro-welfare in general, while other groups, who are considered to be 'net-payers' of welfare and much less in need of social benefits and services, are anti-welfare. However, if welfare state legitimacy is truly multidimensional, various aspects are expected to have different causes. In that case, the idea of a single welfarism attitude dimension runs the risk of giving too simple a picture of welfare attitude formation.

For the above mentioned reasons, the authors of this study believe that the question of the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes is a pressing one. A few studies have addressed this issue explicitly (e.g. Gelissen, 2000; Sabbagh & Vanhuysse, 2006; Sihvo & Uusitalo, 1995; Svallfors, 1991, 1995). However, as is explained in the following section, there is still an apparent lack of knowledge regarding the possible dimensions and their interrelations, which restricts our understanding of welfare state legitimacy and the factors influencing it. In this article, using data from a 2006 Dutch national welfare survey, the researchers aimed to contribute to the literature by analysing the following questions regarding the multidimensionality of welfare support:

1. How many dimensions are needed to represent 43 welfare attitude items in the data?
2. Can these dimensions be represented by a single higher-order, general pro versus contra welfare dimension?
3. Which characteristics of people are associated with their evaluations of the various dimensions of the welfare state?

In addressing these questions, first previous multidimensional legitimacy studies are discussed before proceeding with an explanation of data and methods used in this study, and continuing with a discussion of the empirical findings. The article concludes with some points for further discussion.

Multiple dimensions of welfare legitimacy: a literature review

Although the multidimensionality of welfare state support has, at times, been readily acknowledged (Andress & Heien, 2001; Roller, 1995), the lion's share of empirical welfare studies has nevertheless focused exclusively on opinions regarding the welfare role of government. Among the studies that have gone beyond this focus, several approaches can be distinguished. A first group of studies discussed opinions concerning various welfare state issues (such as spending levels, benefit levels, images of target groups, abuse perceptions, bureaucracy), but these did not attempt to relate the various aspects to each other and thus essentially neglected the question of multidimensionality (see e.g. Hills, 2002; Ploug, 1996; Van Oorschot, 1998). A second group consists of studies that combined a number of opinions on various welfare-related issues into a single, additive scale, without any analysis of whether this was justified, going beyond a Cronbach's alpha reliability test. Yet, as Cronbach's alpha can hardly be seen as a stringent test for the dimensionality of a scale (Sijtsma, 2009), these studies were unable to provide a satisfactory answer to the present research question. Examples of this approach can be found in Bryson (1997) and Gidengil et al. (2003).

Far fewer studies have explicitly addressed the dimensionality of welfare attitudes. A few studies applied exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to test whether sets of items clustered in different factors. If so, scales were constructed from items that loaded on one and the same factor. Yet these exploratory factor analyses were often carried out in a manner that resulted in their failing to provide a stringent test of the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes. For example, Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) departed from the idea that welfare attitudes separate into at least five different dimensions: responsibility for welfare (public, private, civic); financing (public spending); use of the welfare state (overuse and underuse); outputs (sufficiency of incomes, and of services); and effects of the welfare state (inequality reduction and making people passive or dependent). Based on the finding that EFA reproduces all of these hypothesised dimensions, Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) concluded that people indeed might

[1] This is especially the case with cross-national datasets. The International Social Survey Programme(ISSP), with its modules on Role of Government, is exceptional in that the modules pay most attention to welfare attitudes compared with, for example, the World Values Survey or the European Social Survey. It is therefore the most used dataset for cross-national studies of welfare legitimacy. However, the ISSP questions relevant for analysing welfare legitimacy are still limited to one that asks about the role of government in taking responsibilities in a series of policy fields (Roller's 'degree' concept), and one that asks about preferred government spending levels in these fields (Roller's 'range' concept). More recently, however, the European Social Survey released the data of its 2008 wave which contains a detailed module on welfare attitudes.

have different opinions on various issues, while relatively low intercorrelations between the dimensions suggested that the retrieved dimensions were not reducible to a single, underlying welfarism dimension. As an additional argument for multidimensionality, Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) proposed that they found substantial differences in the determinant structures of the various scales. Yet their analysis was limited, because instead of formulating one factor model that included all dimensions and items, a factor analysis was performed separately for each of the five dimensions. This made it impossible to discover whether the proposed dimensions were reducible to a more limited number of factors. Neither could they reveal whether some of the items loaded on multiple factors at a time. Thus, rather than performing a truly critical test of the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes, Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) showed that their items tapped into a number of predefined factors.

A second example is a study by Svallfors (1991) concerning welfare attitudes in Sweden. It predefined four dimensions of welfare policy and measured each with a set of indicators. These dimensions were: (i) the distributional dimension, measuring attitudes to social spending in various areas (such as, healthcare, support for the elderly, support for families, social assistance, education); (ii) the administration, or implementation, dimension, measuring attitudes to welfare institutions and procedures; (iii) the cost dimension, focusing on issues of welfare financing; and (iv) the abuse dimension, measuring attitudes to claimants' groups and their alleged misuse of entitlements. Unlike Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995), Svallfors (1991) provided a test of multidimensionality by taking all items for the four dimensions into account in a single EFA. A series of six separate factors were found, from which it was concluded that:

> . . . welfare policy can and should be treated as a multi-dimensional and highly complex phenomenon. Instead of basing analyses of public support for welfare policies on a single 'for or against welfare state', it should be recognised that attitudes to welfare policy can be fragmented or even contradictory (Svallfors, 1991: 617).

Like Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995), Svallfors (1991) found that the effects of a series of determinants differed for each single dimension. However, the problem here is that Svallfors (1991) chose to rotate the factor structure orthogonally (the so-called VARIMAX rotation), which implies that the dimensional structure was preconstructed in such a way that the factors did not intercorrelate. In other words, instead of testing relations between various dimensions, Svallfors (1991) assumed a priori that they were unrelated, and imposed zero correlations in the model. If he had not rotated the factors orthogonally, he might well have found, as Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) did, that there were intercorrelations between (several of) the dimensions. If these had been substantial, there might have been reason to further analyse the question of whether, and to what degree, they would reflect one single underlying welfarism dimension. A very similar approach was found in Svallfors (1995).

Finally, only two studies were located that addressed the dimensionality of welfare attitudes by means of a more adequate analysis strategy. Based on Eurobarameter data, Gelissen (2000) used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to investigate support for welfare provisions and its antecedents in 11 European countries. In his study, Gelissen (2000) focused on the two well-known welfare attitude dimensions proposed by Roller (1995), namely, the preferred range of domains in which government should intervene (the extensiveness of welfare interventions), and the preferred degree to which government should be active in these domains (the intensiveness of welfare interventions). Gelissen's (2000) CFA showed that extensiveness and intensiveness formed two distinct, but correlated factors. The finding that the two dimensions had different antecedents – class indicators, for example, seemed to influence the intensiveness, rather than the extensiveness dimension – strengthens the case for a multidimensional treatment of welfare attitudes. However, a crucial limitation of the study by Gelissen (2000) is that only two possible dimensions of welfare attitudes were taken into account, both referring to goals of the welfare state rather than to means or outputs.

Sabbagh and Vanhuysse (2006) similarly addressed the question of multidimensionality by means of CFA. Analysing student samples from eight different countries, they argued for the existence of two ideological meta-frames (i.e. market-based versus welfare-statist) underlying a range of welfare attitudes, each consisting of three dimensions. They concluded that support for egalitarian distribution, the preferred scope of the welfare state, and external attribution of social inequality were each distinct dimensions that were constitutive of a welfare-statist position. However, a drawback of this study is that it was based on university student samples. Sabbagh and Vanhuysse (2006) acknowledged that the generalisability of findings from this very specific and highly educated faction was not guaranteed.

From this brief review of the literature, it was concluded that stringent tests of the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes were still lacking. Several studies claimed to present evidence for welfare attitude multidimensionality, but to date, they have taken an overly limited number of possible dimensions into account, or they have applied inadequate methodological tools and have not been based on general population data, as the above examples show. Despite these shortcomings,

existing research was a useful starting point in the sense that it suggested a number of potential dimensions of welfare legitimacy. The researchers interpreted the single items measured by Bryson (1997) and Gidengil et al. (2003) as reflecting various dimensions of the welfare state, such as the principles on which welfare is based, the role of government in the provision of welfare, implementation practices and unintended outcomes of the welfare state. There is quite a strong overlap with the dimensions distinguished by Sihvo and Uusitalo (1995) regarding responsibility for welfare and the role of government, use and abuse of the welfare state, and effects and consequences of the welfare state. In addition, Sihvo and Uusitalo distinguished the aspects of financing and outputs (in terms of sufficiency of incomes and of services). Svallfors' (1991) dimensions overlapped with these regarding the administration or implementation of welfare, the costs and financing of welfare, and the use or abuse dimension. Svallfors' distributional dimension seemed to be particular, but was actually operationalised in terms of people's opinions regarding the degree to which government should spend in various areas of social policy. This is similar to what Roller (1995) referred to as the 'degree' or 'intensity' aspect of the 'role of government' dimension.

The various dimensions that come to mind on the basis of this overview can be meaningfully grouped from a theoretical perspective which sees the welfare state, not as a static phenomenon in itself, but as a dynamic institution that governs a series of processes (Deakin et al., 2003). From this perspective, the welfare state can be seen as an institution which, on the basis of certain *principles*, compels *government to take responsibility* for a certain range and degree of social welfare provision for which it *implements* certain policies, which in turn have certain *intended effects*, and may have certain *unintended consequences*. Thus, it was hypothesised that attitudes to welfare could be separated into the following six dimensions:

1. Support for the principles of the welfare state;
2. The preferred range of the role of government ('extensiveness');
3. The preferred degree of government spending ('intensiveness');
4. Evaluation of the implementation of welfare policies;
5. Evaluation of the outcomes of the welfare state;
6. Perceived consequences of the welfare state.

Data and methods

Data

Data were drawn from a national representative welfare opinion survey conducted from October to November 2006, from the Dutch population aged 16 years or above. This dataset was uniquely detailed in that it contained over 50 attitude questions referring to various aspects and dimensions of the welfare state. The total questionnaire was divided into three parts which were put successively to all respondents in three waves over a 6-week period. The sample was taken from a large, national representative panel (run by the Centre for Data of Tilburg University, The Netherlands), and respondents filled out computer-based questionnaires online. Of the 2,682 selected respondents, 1,972 filled in the sub-questionnaires of all three waves, and thus completed the total questionnaire, giving a response rate of 73 per cent. In this response group, there was a very slight under-representation of younger people, people of a lower educational level and people on lower incomes. The Dutch *Stichting Instituut Gak* financed the survey.

Dependent variables: welfare dimensions

The questionnaire contained several indicators for each of the six potential dimensions that were previously determined. Here, these items are discussed briefly (exact question wordings can be found in the Appendix). In respect of welfare principles, the dataset had two items that indicated the principle of equality, which traditionally guides the actions of welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Specifically, these items referred to a moral evaluation of income inequalities and to the desirability of reducing these inequalities. But there were also items that allowed for the inclusion of the more recent principle of activation which has been implemented by many developed welfare states that increasingly focus on employment policies and the re-integration of unemployed people at the cost of reductions in income benefit schemes (Hvinden, 2008). Six items referred to conditions that needed to be fulfilled in order for an unemployed person to keep his or her benefit.

Roller's (1995) 'range' aspect of the responsibility-of-government dimension was measured using two different sets of items. One set concerned whether or not the government should take measures to protect weaker groups in the society in general, and the other was whether or not the government should take responsibility for protecting people from certain social risks, such as unemployment or becoming incapacitated for work. Yet, apart from old risks, some items also referred to so-called new social risks, such as divorcing or becoming a single parent (for these types of risks, see e.g. Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

Support for government spending – i.e. the 'degree' aspect of role-of-government (Roller, 1995) – was operationalised by means of questions on preferred spending levels for several social benefits. The items

referred to work-related (e.g. unemployment, sickness, disability), as well as other benefits (e.g. social assistance, pensions). The aspect of the implementation of welfare policies referred to here concerned people's perceptions of the abuse of a number of benefits. In addition, the questionnaire contained a single item concerning people's perceptions of underuse, or non-take-up of welfare benefits. Popular evaluations of welfare outcomes were indicated by people's perceptions of the adequacy of benefits, i.e. their thoughts concerning the ease, or difficulty, with which claimants of a number of benefits could make ends meet. Finally, this study included several measurements of perceived consequences of welfare policies. Specifically, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements regarding the possible consequences of the social benefits system. The consequences mentioned were separated into three categories: i.e. economic, moral and social consequences.

Independent variables

The antecedents of people's evaluations of the various welfare state dimensions were explored by means of multivariate regression models. Exploring such antecedents explicitly meant that the intention was not to develop and test explanatory models for each of the dimensions distinguished. This was deemed too ambitious for this article, given the fact that, in existing research, the antecedents of most of the dimensions had not yet been theorised and systematically tested. However, this does not mean that an indiscriminate set of possible antecedents was analysed. On the contrary, variable selection followed one of the main conclusions of theoretical (e.g. Elster, 1990; Mansbridge, 1990) as well as empirical (e.g. Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Chong et al., 2001; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Van Oorschot, 2006) welfare attitude studies which claimed that such antecedents were grouped into two sets of factors. On the one hand, there were people's objective, or structural, characteristics, such as age, income level and work status, which often indicated the degree of people's personal interest in the benefits and services of the welfare state. A usual and often corroborated hypothesis was that people with a stronger interest in social protection had more positive attitudes towards, and positive perceptions of, the arrangements and outcomes of the welfare state. Taking this as a leading hypothesis, less critical evaluations were expected among those who usually depended on the welfare state, such as women, older people, people with lower incomes, people with lower educational levels, employees in the (semi-) public sector, unemployed people and people on social benefits. On the other hand, there were people's ideological positions. The data allowed for the inclusion of people's political stance on a left–right continuum, which in many welfare support studies had been shown to have a significant effect in that left-leaning people tended to be less critical, or more positive, about welfare generally. Hence, the following independent variables were included in the regression analyses: gender; age (in years); income (net monthly income of household, subdivided into quintiles); educational level (primary school, lower vocational, middle vocational, secondary school, higher vocational, university); work status (employed private sector, employed public sector or semi-public sector, self-employed, unemployed, pensioner, other, e.g. student, homemaker); use of benefits (a dummy indicating whether the respondent currently received an unemployment benefit, a disability benefit, sick pay or social assistance); political stance (self-assessment on a left–right scale ranging from 1 to 10).

Methodology

The above mentioned studies illustrate that in order to readdress the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes, it is indispensible to make a careful selection from the available statistical tools. In this study, CFA, more than EFA for example, was the appropriate statistical tool for this dimensionality study (Thompson, 2004). Similar to EFA, CFA assumes that one or more underlying latent factors are responsible for the covariances between observed items. Thus, although CFA and EFA have a lot in common, each technique is based on a very different logic. EFA is a data-driven technique that explores the underlying factor structure without imposing a preconceived model on the data. Therefore, it is to be preferred when the researcher has no theoretical expectations at all regarding the factor structure. CFA, on the other hand, is used to assess the discrepancy between the data and some a priori theoretical expectations on the factor structure. CFA is a far more powerful and versatile statistical tool, provided that one can fall back on more or less clear expectations of possible dimensional structures. The latter was, indeed, found to be the case here. The literature review presented above suggests at least six distinguishable dimensions of welfare attitudes: (i) support for the principles of the welfare state; (ii) preferred range of the role of government; (iii) preferred degree of government spending; (iv) evaluation of the implementation of welfare policies; (v) evaluation of the outcomes of the welfare state; and (vi) perceived consequences of the welfare state. Crucial advantages of CFA are that this technique renders it possible to evaluate whether the dimensions identified fit with the model of welfarism devised (see Table 1) in terms of the various indices studied. CFA also provides more detailed insight into the discrepancies between the specified model and the observed data. Other major advantages of CFA include detailed control over the

Table 1. Fit indices for various confirmatory factor analyses models.

Model	Model description				Model comparison		
	χ^2	d.f.	RMSEA	CFI	Дχ^2	Дd.f.	p-value
Model 1: One factor	15325.11	860	0.0924	0.785	—	—	—
Model 2: Six factors	10877.10	845	0.0776	0.851	4448.01	15	0.0000
Model 3: Ten factors	4361.76	817	0.0469	0.947	6515.34	28	0.0000

d.f., degrees of freedom; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; CFI, comparative fit index.

devised model (e.g. by constraining or relaxing some parameters), statistical tests to compare competing theoretical models and the possibility to specify more complex factor structures, such as second-order factors. As shown below, these were deemed crucial components with which adequately to address the question of the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes.[2]

Results

CFA: the dimensionality of welfare attitudes

A first step in this empirical analysis consisted of testing whether or not welfare legitimacy was a multidimensional concept and, if so, what different dimensions could then be distinguished. In order to answer this research question, several increasingly complex factor models related to the multidimensionality of welfare attitudes were tested (Brown, 2006). Because the models were nested (i.e. the parameters of the least complex model were a subset of the parameters of the other models), model fit could be compared to determine which offered the best description of the observed data, as presented in Table 1.

The researchers began by estimating a single-factor model in which all 43 welfare items loaded onto one latent variable. Judging by the variety of fit indices (Brown, 2006; Byrne, 1998; Hu & Bentler, 1991), there was an unacceptable discrepancy between the model and the data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) equalled 0.0924, which was substantially greater than the commonly accepted cut-off point of 0.05. Furthermore, the comparative fit index (CFI = 0.785) was not sufficiently close to 1. This indicated that welfare attitudes were too complex to be captured by means of a single dimension.

Second, a model was developed containing the six dimensions derived from the literature review to reflect the findings that the welfare state was a dynamic institution. Specifying six different latent variables – instead of a single latent variable – resulted in a better fit with the model such that the chi-squared value decreased by almost 4,500 units while only 15 degrees of freedom were lost. However, the RMSEA (0.0776) and CFI (0.851) indicated that the six-factor model still did not give a satisfactory description of the data structure. Therefore, the researchers continued by inspecting modification indices in order to detect the sources of this misfit. Patterns of modification indices suggested that a still greater number of dimensions were needed to give an accurate account of the structure of welfare legitimacy that was emerging in the study. First, the principle dimension turned out to comprise two distinct principles underlying contemporary welfare states, namely, the principle of equality and the principle of activation. Second, the preferred range of the role of government could also be separated into two factors, one referring to the responsibility of the government to protect weaker social groups in general, and the other regarding the responsibility of the government to offer protection against a series of specific social risks. Third, rather than a single overall evaluation of the implementation of welfare policies, two more specific dimensions were found, namely, perceptions of the over- and underuse of benefits. Finally, respondents appeared to perceive various types of consequences of the welfare state. On the one hand, a factor measuring the perceived social consequences of the welfare state was found. The items loading on this factor dealt with the positive consequences of social benefits for social life, such as the reduction of income inequalities and the reduction of poverty. On the other hand, perceptions of negative moral and economic consequences tended to cluster on a single dimension, i.e. the general opinion that the welfare state has adverse effects on the performance of the economy. This specific attitude structure (i.e. one

[2] All CFA models presented below were estimated with LISREL 8.7 (Byrne, 1998; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Because all items were measured on 3- or 5-point scales, and some of the items showed a high degree of skewness, the assumption of multivariate normality was violated. To deal with these violations, a 'weighted least squares' estimation procedure was applied, in which polychoric correlations and asymptotic covariance matrices were used as input, rather than regular covariance matrices (Jöreskog, 1990). Missing values on the welfare attitude items were imputed by means of the expectation–maximization algorithm implied in LISREL 8.7. This procedure replaces missing values by random draws from the distribution, conditional on the known information.

factor with social consequences and one with combined economic and moral consequences) mirrored the Dutch public debate in which negative *economic* and *moral* consequences often appeared to be connected, while positive *social* consequences were mentioned only rarely. These modifications resulted in the identification of ten latent factors:

1 – PRINEQUAL Principle of equality
2 – PRINACTIV Principle of activation
3 – ROGWEAK Role of government – protection of the weak
4 – ROGRISK Role of government – protection from social risks
5 – SPENDING Support for government spending
6 – OVERUSE Perceived overuse of social benefits
7 – UNDERUSE Perceived underuse of social benefits
8 – OUTCOME Evaluation of the outcomes of the welfare state.
9 – CONSSOCIAL Perceived social consequences
10 – CONSECOMOR Perceived economic and moral consequences

A model containing these ten factors, instead of the original six, gave a substantially better account of the data. The drop in chi-squared was notably significant, and both the RMSEA (0.0469) and CFI (0.947) indicated that the overall model fit was acceptable. In this final model, all standardised factor loadings were quite high (mostly over .70, see Table 2) and decidedly significant. Together with the absence of cross-loadings, this indicated that the items were reliable indicators of the intended concepts. Additional tests (not reported here) showed that all attempts to reduce the number of factors to less than ten resulted in significantly weaker models. The finding that ten clearly distinct factors could be measured adequately, and were necessary to describe the data, supported the claim that welfare attitudes should be treated as truly multidimensional.

A general welfarism dimension?

Although the ten latent variables clearly represented distinct dimensions, they were not independent from one another. Significant correlations existed between the latent factors, meaning that attitudes towards one aspect of the welfare state, therefore, contained information on opinions regarding the other aspects. This raised the question as to whether, and to what extent, it was possible to speak of a single, general pro versus contra welfare dimension that caused the observed pattern of correlations. To answer this question, yet another model was formulated in which a second-order factor – i.e. a factor that was not measured directly by the items, but on which all first-order latent variables loaded – replaced the correlations between the latent variables. This second-order factor captured what the ten latent variables had in common, and could thus be seen as an indicator of support for welfare state policies in general. Therefore, this second-order factor was referred to as WELFARISM.

The original second-order factor model had to be adjusted in one respect, i.e. a correlation between PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK had to be tolerated. This correlation meant that these two dimensions shared some content beyond WELFARISM. Both factors seemed to refer to the ideological position that government should intervene to reduce inequality and to protect the weak. After this modification, the second-order factor model had an acceptable fit. For 848 degrees of freedom, the chi-squared value equalled 5100.99, leading to a RMSEA of 0.0503 and a CFI of 0.937. In fact, the second-order factor model had a slightly worse fit than the previous model using first-order factors only. This indicated that second-order factor WELFARISM was not able to explain fully the correlation structure between the latent variables. Apparently, there were elements besides a general pro-welfare disposition that caused specific dimensions to correlate more strongly. This was not surprising, as some dimensions referred to general welfare principles, while others dealt with the more concrete implementations or consequences of policies. However, as the overall fit of the model was acceptable, it could be concluded that the relations between the ten dimensions were, for a relatively large part, accounted for by the common element of WELFARISM.

The standardised second-order factor loadings, expressing the strength of the relation between the ten dimensions and the general factor of WELFARISM, are given in Table 3. The second column of this table contains the shared variances, i.e. the proportion of variance that the separate dimensions had in common with the second-order factor. Judging by the strength of the factor loadings, three dimensions – ROGWEAK, SPENDING and CONSECOMOR – are the key constituents of a pro-welfare attitude. Each of these three dimensions shares over two-thirds of its variance with the second-order factor. A general disposition to support welfare systems thus consists, in the first place, of the view that the government should take action to reduce inequality, should spend adequate amounts on social protection and that such interventions do not have unfavourable repercussions in the economic or moral spheres (after all, the loading for CONSECOMOR was negative). The finding that attitudes towards the role of government belonged to the core of welfarism was an important one. To a certain extent, it legitimised the dominant practice of focusing on the role-of-government indicators, as this appeared to be the dimension closest to overall welfarism.

Table 2. Standardised factor loadings for the final model (Model 3).

	PRINACTIV	PRINEQUAL	ROGWEAK	ROGRISK	SPENDING	OVERUSE	UNDERUSE	OUTCOMES	CONSECOMOR	CONSSOCIAL
Act1	0.84									
Act2	0.99									
Act3	0.89									
Act4	0.94									
Act5	0.95									
Act6	0.92									
Eq1		0.93								
Eq2		0.93								
Rog1			0.81							
Rog2			0.67							
Rog3			0.73							
Rog4			0.79							
Rog5			0.74							
Risk1				0.67						
Risk2				0.87						
Risk3				0.7						
Risk4				0.91						
Spenw1					0.89					
Spenw2					0.79					
Spenw3					0.55					
Over1						0.85				
Over2						0.91				
Over3						0.84				
Over4						0.75				
Under1							1			
Out1								0.72		
Out2								0.74		
Out3								0.95		
Out4								0.71		
Out5								0.87		
Eco1									0.88	
Eco2									0.89	
Eco3									0.81	
Eco4									0.87	
Mor1									0.93	
Mor2									0.91	
Mor3									0.87	
Mor4									0.66	
Soc1										0.59
Soc2										0.77
Soc3										0.78
Soc4										0.93
Soc5										0.89

Fit indices: Chi squared: 4361.76; d.f = 817; RMSEA = 0.047; CFI = 0.95
d.f., degrees of freedom; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; CFI, comparative fit index.

Table 3. Second-order factor loadings on WELFARISM and shared variances.

	WELFARISM	Proportion of shared variance
PRINACTIV	–0.22	0.05
PRINEQUAL	0.71	0.50
ROGWEAK	0.83	0.68
ROGRISK	0.51	0.26
SPENDING	0.82	0.67
OVERUSE	–0.66	0.44
UNDERUSE	0.38	0.14
OUTCOMES	–0.63	0.40
CONSECOMOR	–0.85	0.73
CONSSOCIAL	0.74	0.55

The dimensions least connected to the WELFARISM factor were people's ideas on the role of the government in the protection from accepted social risks (ROGRISK), their perceptions of non-take-up of benefits (UNDERUSE), and especially, their attitudes towards the principle of activation (PRINACTIV). These dimensions shared roughly between 5 and 25 per cent of their variance with the general pro or contra welfare dimension, meaning that they were, for the largest part, determined by considerations apart from welfarism. With correlations ranging in absolute value of between 0.60 and 0.80, the remaining four dimensions (PRINEQUAL, OUTCOMES, CONSSOCIAL and OVERUSE) are situated in between. This means that these dimensions have about half of their variance in common with the second-order factor, while the other half was found to be dimension-specific.

This analysis indicated that it was indeed possible to speak of a general welfarism dimension, and provided a view on what this dimension essentially represented. Nevertheless, it should be clear that welfare attitudes could not be reduced entirely to this overarching disposition to support the welfare state in general. Besides the meaning they shared, the separate dimensions also had, to a certain extent, content that was dimension-specific and which merited the attention of welfare attitude researchers. Researchers that solely focused on welfarism glossed over a part of the story that might deepen insight into the formation of welfare attitudes.

Differential antecedents of the welfare attitude dimensions

A study of the dimensionality of welfare attitudes could not bypass the question of whether or not attitudes towards various aspects of the welfare state had similar antecedents. Previous research has repeatedly shown that popular evaluations of the welfare state depends on an individual's structural position in society, reflecting interests in social protection, and ideological variables, such as political stance (see e.g. Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; Van Oorschot, 2002). Therefore, whether or not these classical variables in welfare research had a differential impact on the welfare attitude dimensions was investigated. Table 4 presents the results of multiple regression analyses that were performed for this purpose. The dependent variables in these analyses are the ten dimensions of welfare attitudes that were discovered earlier.[3] To facilitate comparison between the models, all dependent variables were standardised prior to analysis. Furthermore, the scores of the dimensions that loaded negatively on WELFARISM (i.e. PRINACTIV, OUTCOMES, CONSECOMOR and OVERUSE) were reversed, so that higher scores express more positive attitudes towards the welfare state for all dependent variables.

How then might the overarching WELFARISM-factor be explained? Such a model might provide insight into the common roots of the different dimensions of welfare attitudes. WELFARISM turned out to be influenced, in the first place, by an individual's ideological orientation, as indicated by political stance on a left versus right scale. As expected, left-leaning respondents tended to be far more supportive of the welfare state than right-leaning respondents.[4] The ideology effect was substantial. Political stance alone explained almost a quarter of the variance in pro or contra welfare attitudes. The strong impact of ideological position confirmed the earlier finding that second-order factor WELFARISM contained an important ideological component, referring to the goals pursued by welfare policy.

Besides ideology, socio-demographic and interest indicators also had an impact on welfarist dispositions. Males, as well as persons between 45 and 65 years old, were found to be more supportive of the welfare state in general. Regarding the income of the respondents, those in the highest quintile were significantly more critical of the welfare state, although this income-effect was quite small. Some evidence was found that education had an indirect, rather than direct, impact on WELFARISM, via political ideology. On average, the higher educated had a more leftist orientation (the results are not given here), which brought with it higher levels of support for the welfare state. Contrary to the factor of

[3] The factor scores on the dimensions were calculated by summing the items weighted by the factor regression scores that were obtained as output from the LISREL CFA analysis. More weight was thus given to items with higher factor loadings.

[4] Some would say that left–right ideology is a fundamental ideological aspect of welfarism and not a possible determinant. However, the researchers agree with Edlund's argument (Edlund, 2006: 80) that left–right self-identification is conceptually different from state-intervention orientations. The relation between the two is an empirical matter, not a conceptual one.

Table 4. Multivariate regression models for various welfare attitude dimensions – parameter estimates.

	WELFARISM	PRINEQUAL	PRINACTIV (reversed)	ROGWEAK	ROGRISK	SPENDING	OVERUSE (reversed)	UNDERUSE	OUTCOMES (reversed)	CONSECOMOR (reversed)	CONSSOCIAL
Intercept	0.97***	1.38***	0.98***	1.41***	–0.42**	0.71***	0.58***	0.10	0.21	0.50***	0.37*
Gender											
Male	0.09*	–0.06	0.06	0.08*	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.14**	0.03	0.07	0.13**
(ref.cat. : female)											
Age (years)											
25–44	0.00	–0.18	–0.34**	–0.11	0.30**	–0.26*	–0.30**	0.38***	0.48***	0.10	–0.11
45–65	0.24**	–0.06	–0.33**	–0.04	0.60***	0.02	0.00	0.47***	0.60***	0.24*	–0.05
65+	0.17	0.11	–0.52***	–0.04	0.50***	–0.01	–0.06	0.33**	0.45***	0.13	–0.03
(ref.cat. : 15–24)											
Income											
Quintile 2	0.06	0.07	–0.26***	0.04	0.20**	0.07	0.03	–0.10	0.04	0.01	0.03
Quintile 3	0.05	–0.02	–0.19**	–0.05	–0.03	0.05	0.03	–0.01	0.06	0.04	0.16*
Quintile 4	0.00	–0.19**	–0.24***	–0.16**	0.15*	–0.04	0.12	–0.15*	–0.02	0.06	0.13
Quintile 5	–0.14*	–0.36***	–0.27***	–0.25***	0.06	–0.07	–0.03	–0.15*	–0.02	–0.08	0.12
(ref.cat. : Quintile 1)											
Education											
Lower vocational	0.02	–0.13	–0.16	–0.11	0.03	–0.01	0.05	0.10	–0.03	0.13	–0.01
Middle vocational	0.06	–0.35***	–0.17	–0.20*	0.32**	–0.16	0.27*	0.03	–0.21	0.31**	0.02
Secondary school	0.01	–0.19	–0.13	–0.16	0.11	–0.15	0.08	0.03	–0.12	0.19	0.05
Higher vocational	0.07	–0.43***	–0.21*	–0.24**	0.20	–0.15	0.29**	–0.16	–0.20	0.35***	0.17
Universitary	0.01	–0.63***	–0.16	–0.39***	0.12	–0.26*	0.38***	–0.22	–0.29*	0.42***	0.22
(ref.cat.: primary school)											
Work status											
(Semi-)public	0.13*	0.17**	–0.01	0.15*	–0.03	0.09	0.03	–0.05	0.07	0.08	0.09
Self-employed	–0.14	–0.30**	–0.13	–0.06	–0.11	–0.08	–0.05	–0.15	0.05	–0.18	0.10
Unemployed	0.46***	0.21*	0.27*	0.43***	0.03	0.30**	0.32**	0.15	0.27*	0.36***	0.20
Other	0.15**	0.09	–0.01	0.11	0.09	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.13	0.04	0.19**
(ref.cat.: private)											
Use of benefits	0.26***	0.18*	0.03	0.23***	–0.02	0.29***	0.15*	–0.01	0.10	0.25***	0.01
Political stance	–0.23***	–0.18***	–0.06***	–0.22***	–0.05***	–0.11***	–0.13***	–0.09***	–0.12***	–0.18***	–0.11***
Adjusted R^2	0.300	0.234	0.041	0.263	0.051	0.106	0.127	0.060	0.094	0.192	0.077

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

education, work status was perceivably related to WELFARISM. Those employed in the (semi-)public sector, the unemployed, and those not in the labour market, held more positive attitudes towards the welfare state in general. Finally, current use of welfare benefits (the most direct indicator of personal interest in welfare policies) was also a significant predictor of support for the welfare state. Therefore, in agreement with rational-choice arguments and common findings in welfare attitude studies, people were more welfare-minded if they were in positions that implied greater (or greater chances of) welfare state dependency (lower income, employment in the public sector, unemployment and use of benefits). With all variables taken together, the model (see Table 4) explained roughly one-third of the total variance in WELFARISM.

For each of the ten dimensions of welfare attitudes described above, a regression model containing exactly the same set of independent variables as the explanation model for WELFARISM was estimated. These analyses yielded quite different patterns from the ones found for WELFARISM, suggesting that the antecedents of welfare attitudes were indeed dimension-specific. Significant gender differences, for example, were present for only three dimensions. Females were more critical of government intervention in order to protect weak groups in society (ROGWEAK), opined less often that welfare policies had positive social consequences (CONSSOCIAL) and perceived lower levels of benefit underuse (UNDERUSE). Regarding the other dimensions, attitude differences between males and females were negligible.

While age had no impact on some of the dimensions, strong age-effects were present for others. Very similar curve-linear patterns were found for people's ideas regarding the role of government with regards to provision for social risks (ROGRISK), their perceptions of the adequacy of benefits (OUTCOMES), their perception of the degree of non-take-up (UNDERUSE), and also, to a lesser extent, for their perceptions of the economic and moral consequences of welfare (CONSECOMOR). Each time, people between the ages of 45 and 64 were found to be least critical of these aspects, while the most critical views were found among the youngest cohort (15 to 24 years of age). The regression model for people's ideas on the principle of activation (PRINACTIV), however, revealed very different age-effects. Here, the strongest opposition against the principle was found among the youngest group, likely because of the specific wording of the items measuring support for activation: three of six items specifically referred to young unemployed persons. Furthermore, the group between 25 and 44 years of age was the most critical of government spending (SPENDING) and perceived most benefit overuse (OVERUSE). Not surprisingly, it was precisely this age group (which would contribute significantly to the welfare budget in their future lives and which had no immediate perspective on enjoying retirement benefits) that had negative attitudes toward the financial aspects of the welfare state. Individuals' disposable income turned out to be especially relevant for the ideological attitudinal dimensions relating to the general principles of the welfare state. People in the two highest income quintiles less frequently endorsed the principles of equality (PRINEQUAL) and governmental intervention to protect weaker social groups (ROGWEAK). The lowest support for activation policies (PRINACTIV) was found among people in the lowest income category.

While education was not found to have any direct impact on WELFARISM, the educational level did matter for some specific aspects of attitudes towards the welfare state. The sign of the education-effect differed according to the specific content of the dimension concerned. The higher educated scored lower on dimensions referring to the general principles of the welfare state, such as PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK. At the same time, those with a higher educational level were less concerned with the unintended negative effects of the welfare state, such as possible moral and economic consequences (CONSECOMOR) and benefit overuse (OVERUSE).

Although the significance of the effects differed, the effects of work status were considerably similar across the welfare attitude dimension. For almost every dimension, the unemployed held more favourable views on the welfare state, a pattern that was also found in the regression model for WELFARISM. Besides that, employees in the public, or semi-public, sector were more supportive of the principles of equality (PRINEQUAL) and government intervention (ROGWEAK), while the self-employed were rather ill-disposed towards the equality principle. Another interesting finding was that those not in the labour market more frequently thought of the welfare state as having positive social consequences (CONSSOCIAL).

Current use of welfare benefits led to more supportive attitudes for about half of the dimensions, covering a wide variety of aspects of the welfare state (PRINEQUAL, ROGWEAK, SPENDING, CONSECOMOR and OVERUSE), while significant effects were absent for the other dimensions. The dimensions on which benefit use had an impact were precisely those with the strongest loadings on the second-order factor WELFARISM.

Finally, ideological position had a significant effect on all dimensions of welfare attitudes: a more leftist orientation led to more positive attitudes towards every surveyed aspect of the welfare state. For dimensions referring to the key principles of the welfare state (PRINEQUAL and ROGWEAK), or to negative moral

and economic consequences (CONSECOMOR), ideology was a far better predictor than interest-related characteristics.[5]

Dimensions regarding the practical organisation of the welfare state, such as the level of spending (SPENDING), the range of risks the government should offer protection against (ROGRISK), satisfaction with benefit levels (OUTCOMES), perception of social consequences (CONSSOCIAL) or over- and under-use of benefits (OVERUSE, UNDERUSE), depended, to a lesser extent, on political stance, although ideology-effects were still notably significant.

Thus it might be concluded that, although some common patterns were detected, the various dimensions had quite different antecedents. For example, socio-economic status did not lead uniformly to more positive or negative evaluations of aspects of the welfare state. Instead, the strength, and sometimes even the sign, of the effects depended on the specific content of the dimensions concerned. This confirms the hypothesis that welfare attitudes are multidimensional, and that it is necessary to disentangle these various dimensions in order fully to grasp the genesis of welfare legitimacy.

Conclusion and discussion

This article reports on a study of whether it was possible that individual citizens who emphatically endorsed a substantial role for government in the provision of welfare could, at the same time, be critical about specific aspects of such provision. In other words, is the social legitimacy of the welfare state multidimensional, or not? Using CFA, a stringent dimensionality test which had a unique diversity of attitude indicators revealed that welfare legitimacy is indeed multidimensional, as prior research had suggested. Ten factors or dimensions were discerned to reflect the structure of the 43 welfare questions that were analysed in the study herein reported. These dimensions included the underlying principles of welfare state provision, the role of government, the degree of social spending, implementation practice, social outcomes, and unintended effects. Since these dimensions correlated, to a degree, with one another, the question was raised as to whether, and to what extent, they were concrete expressions of a more general underlying welfarism dimension. Second-order factor analysis showed that it was possible to construct an overarching pro- versus contra-welfare dimension consisting of views that the government should intervene to reduce inequality in society and should spend adequate amounts for this purpose, and that these government provisions did not have unfavourable repercussions in the economic or moral spheres. However, the separate dimensions could not be reduced entirely to this general welfarism dimension. Besides the meaning they shared, the separate dimensions also had dimension-specific content. Finally, it was found that the ten separate attitudinal dimensions were differently affected by socio-structural position and ideological dispositions. Notwithstanding this, people's political stance on a left–right scale consistently affected their scores on all dimensions in an expected direction: leftist people tended to be more positive towards, or less critical of, all aspects of the welfare state, compared with rightist people.

However, this list of (ten) attitudinal dimensions of welfare is neither exhaustive nor conclusive, though the most crucial aspects of the welfare state have been covered in this study. Adding items referring to more specific aspects or domains in detail might lead to an even higher number of dimensions and, given sufficient data, sub-dimensions might be found. However, this only strengthens the finding for a multidimensional treatment of welfare legitimacy. Furthermore, the dimensional structure of welfare attitudes might well be context specific. It might be expected that in countries other than The Netherlands, with different social realities and welfare systems, not only might people's opinions on the welfare state differ, but they might also be differently structured. In a global, as well as a European, context, The Netherlands is a wealthy country with a well-developed welfare system, which could make some groups of citizens more content with welfare policies (e.g. those who are need in of help), and others less content (e.g. those who have to pay the necessary taxes), compared with countries where provisions are less comprehensive and generous, and therefore cost less. However, because of its comprehensiveness, broad classes of citizens profit from it in some way, and are actually aware of this fact (Van Oorschot, 2002). In other countries with sharper social divisions in welfare, this is not necessarily the case. Where social protection is less comprehensive and class differences in neediness are larger than in The Netherlands, one could perhaps expect more negative public attitudes about claimant groups leading to stronger correlations between ideas on the role of government, on the one hand, and perceptions of overuse and negative moral consequences, on the other. In addition to country differences, opinions and their correlations change over time as a result of changes in the welfare system (e.g. a growing emphasis on welfare-to-work policies), structural changes in society (e.g. an increasing prevalence of 'new' social risks), and ideological changes (e.g. swings in the ideological climate to the political left or right).

Finally, the findings suggest that the dominant practice of exclusively focusing on role-of-government indicators for the measurement of welfare legitimacy, to

[5] This can be deduced from the standardised regression coefficients which, because of lack of space, are not given here.

a degree, is justified in the sense that these dimensions appear to be closest to overall perceptions of welfarism. Hence, one could measure welfare legitimacy using a limited set of survey questions that focused on people's opinions on the range and degree of the welfare responsibilities of the state.

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Appendix

Table Appendix 1: Dimensions of welfare legitimacy: items and scales of measurement.

Dimension	Item	Freq.	N
		% (strongly) agree	
Principle of equality PRINEQUAL	Eq1: 'Large income inequalities are unjust'	42.5	1906
	Eq2: 'Government needs to take substantial measures to reduce income inequalities'	51.4	1907
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		
Principle of activation PRINACTiv	'What should a *long-term* unemployed do in order to keep his or her benefit?'		
	Act1. Search for a job	94.7	1930
	Act2. Participate in reintegration activities	92.2	1919
	Act3. Get schooling or re-training	91.1	1931
	'What should a *young* unemployed person do in order to keep his or her benefit?'		
	Act4. Search for a job	97.6	1943
	Act5. Participate in reintegration activities	95.4	1934
	Act6. Take schooling or re-training	95.6	1856
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		
Role of government		% (strongly) agree/government	
Protection of the weak ROGWEAK	'Government should. . . .'		
	Rog1. reduce income inequalities	50.6	1886
	Rog2. offer more chances for children of poor families to go to university	68.6	1911
	Rog3. spend less on benefits for the poor	7.6	1901
	Rog4. guarantee a reasonable standard of living to unemployed people	47.0	1908
	Rog5. offer a basic minimum income to everybody	52.5	1889
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		
Protection against 'old' social risks ROGRISK	'Should government organise statutory social benefits to provide for the financial needs that arise for people when being . . . or should it be left to people themselves?'		
	Risk1. unemployed	74.8	1858
	Risk2. incapacitated for work	69.3	1894
	Risk3. widow(er)	53.0	1844
	Risk4. ill	71.5	1866
	People-Government (5-point scale)		
	Riskn3. single after co-habitation	7.4	1833
	People–Government (5-point scale)		
Spending		% (strongly) increase	
Benefit spending work-related benefits SPENDING	'Should government increase or decrease the level of the benefit . . . ? Increase would result in higher contributions, decrease in lower contributions.'		
	Spenw1. unemployment benefit	13.6	1860
	Spenw2. disability benefit	39.0	1863
	Spenw3. sick pay	17.1	1866
	Decrease–Stay the same–Increase (5-point scale)		

Dimension	Item	Freq.	N
Implementation		% often	
	'How often is benefit . . . being misused'		
Overuse OVERUSE	Over1. disability benefit	32.6	1846
	Over2. unemployment benefit	42.3	1859
	Over3. social assistance	42.1	1855
	Over4. sick pay	32.5	1780
	Hardly ever–Sometimes–Often (3-point scale)		
Underuse UNDERUSE	Under1. 'How often do you think does it occur that people do not claim or receive a benefit to which they are entitled?'	37.7	1825
	Seldom–Often (5-point scale)		
Outcomes		% (very) difficult	
	'How difficult or easy is it for people with benefit . . . to make ends meet?'		
Making ends meet OUTCOMES	Out1. unemployment benefit	25.4	1728
	Out2. disability benefit	30.7	1719
	Out3. sick pay	50.8	1785
	Out4. old age pension	34.4	1824
	Out5. minimum benefit	49.4	1790
	Easy–Difficult (5-point scale)		
Consequences		% (strongly) agree	
	'Because of the system of social benefits and services . . .'		
Economic and moral CONSECOMOR	Eco1. the international competitiveness of the Dutch economy decreases	26.8	1741
	Eco2. labour costs increase too much	35.1	1825
	Eco3. the economy deteriorates	9.3	1815
	Eco4. unemployment increases	18.6	1835
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		
	'Because of the system of social benefits and services . . .'		
	Mor1. people get lazy	39.4	1921
	Mor2. people lose their sense of self-responsibility for their subsistence	39.2	1910
	Mor3. people become egoistic and calculative	33.6	1878
	Mor4. people do not want to care for each other anymore	37.4	1861
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		
Social CONSSOC	'Because of the system of social benefits and services . . .'		
	Soc1. societal unrest is prevented	57.8	1864
	Soc2. people divorce too easily	71.6	1893
	Soc3. the Dutch population is happier	50.8	1845
	Soc4. wealth is distributed more fairly	55.7	1897
	Soc5. everybody gets a chance to make something of life	59.9	1914
	Disagree–Agree (5-point scale)		